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ABSTRACT

Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO) is an interdisciplinary moral education program that uses the case study of the Holocaust and World War II to develop middle and high school students' critical thinking abilities, trying to help students make connections between this history and current issues of prejudice, racism, and hatred. In the spring of the 1993-94 school year, FHAO conducted a pilot study of an eighth-grade program implementation in a mid-Atlantic urban school district. The study evaluated increases in students' historical knowledge and their ability to make connections between historical events and current issues. Sixty-four students from two predominantly African American classes, one class receiving the FHAO intervention and the other serving as a control group participated. The experimental group showed a significantly greater gain in historical knowledge of the period, based on responses to matching test items and short-answer questions, although the quality of answers varied greatly. FHAO students also showed a significantly greater increase in general items addressing issues such as reasoning about human relationships and the implications of one's actions, but their opinions remained tied to their personal experiences rather than their historical knowledge. Implications for program design and implementation are discussed. Two tables present survey findings. An appendix contains the pretest and posttest student surveys. (SLD)

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FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES: INITIAL EVALUATION OF AN INNER-CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL IMPLEMENTATION

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INTRODUCTION

Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO) is an interdisciplinary, moral education program that uses the case study of the Holocaust and World War II to develop middle and high school students' critical thinking abilities. At the same time, the program tries to help students make connections between history of a half century ago and issues of prejudice, intolerance, racism, and hatred in their world today.

In the spring of the 1993-1994 school year, FHAO conducted a pilot study of an eighth grade program implementation at a middle school in a mid-Atlantic, urban school district. The implementation was a six-week course, integrating FHAO content through language arts, history, mathematics, French, science, and art/music. The study particularly addressed two student outcomes of the program's overall goals:

- to increase knowledge of the period of Nazi totalitarianism and the Holocaust, the causes, and the roles played by various people and groups, and
- to increase ability to make connections between historical events and issues and one's own experiences and choices.

Through the teaching of FHAO, the team of teachers hoped that these middle school students would become more effective learners of the historical subject matter and would be able to apply the knowledge they gained to more general awarenesses in their own social understanding. FHAO anticipated that what they learned about the students in this particular school could be used to guide and improve implementations at middle schools in similar urban locations. In addition, the school district identified the program to support the goals of its Institute for Middle School Reform.

The pilot study involved the development of a testing instrument to be used before and after a period of collaborative instruction in the urban middle school, as well as with a control group; the scoring of student performance on the instrument; and analysis of the performance data.

METHOD

Subjects and Design

Sixty-four students from two eighth grade classes in a predominantly African-American, public, urban middle school were selected to participate in the pilot study. One class of thirty-two students received the six-week FHAO program; the second class of thirty-two students was not exposed to the FHAO materials and served as a control group. School administrators identified the control class as including students most similar in background knowledge and achievement to those of the experimental class. Experimental and control group students were administered the same pretest and posttest at a similar time during the course of the school year.

Pretest and Posttest

All students were given a pretest to assess their prior knowledge relevant to the historical period of the Holocaust and World War II and their level of interpersonal functioning. The pretest consisted of four sections with a total of ten "matching items" and thirteen short-answer questions. Questions addressing specific historical content (i.e., ten matching and six

short-answer items) comprised a "Specific Score" and questions addressing reasoning about human relationships, the implications of one's actions, etc. (seven short-answer items) comprised a "General Score." The posttest was identical to the pretest, with two exceptions: the questions were placed in a different order, and one of the general items, which failed to elicit "thoughtful" responses on the pretest was replaced with a general item asking what were the most important personal learnings during their history/social studies class (see Appendix).

These survey items were similar to those used earlier by FHAO, and were determined to have the potential for producing a range of scorable student responses. However, unlike earlier FHAO surveys, the focus was to have the survey be unambiguous, interesting to students, and shorter in length, that is, easily completed within one class period.

Scoring

For the pretest, all experimental and control surveys were scored by two independent readers. Item discrepancies were discussed, and in most cases, resolved by taking the average of the two scores. Each matching item was given a score of "2" if correct and "0" if incorrect. The scoring system for the short-answer items involved one of two factors: accuracy, or issues. The accuracy factor was used to assess the appropriateness of the information provided for short-answer questions addressing specific historical content. The issues factor dealt with the number of ideas offered in response to short-answer items addressing reasoning about human relationships.

Both the accuracy and issues factors were scored on a four-point scale as follows: (0) no response or very inadequate, (1) moderately inadequate, (2) moderately adequate, and (3) very adequate. For the posttest, each of the two readers scored half of the experimental and half of the control surveys; only a small sample were scored by both readers.

Data Analysis

Only data for students taking both the pretest and posttest were included in the study. As a result, the experimental group was reduced from 32 to 20 subjects (63%) and the control group was reduced from 32 to 16 subjects (50%). The FHAO coordinator at the school was unable to secure completed surveys for these students not having matched data.

In order to confirm that there were no initial group differences between the experimental (E) and control (C) groups, means (M) and standard deviations (SD) of pretest scores were computed and differences between the means were analyzed by use of a t test for independent samples. The results, presented in Table 1 below, show no significant differences in pretest scores for Specific Score, General Score, or Total Score. Thus, group similarity and the effectiveness of the control were confirmed by scores on the pretest. It was therefore decided that independent samples t tests would be appropriate for comparing posttest means; it was not necessary to use the pretest as a covariate.

TABLE 1. T tests for specific, general, and total mean pretest scores for experimental and control group.

GROUP	N	SPECIFIC SCORE			GENERAL SCORE			TOTAL SCORE		
		M	SD	t	M	SD	t	M	SD	t
E	20	7.45	4.02	1.62*	9.20	2.59	-.88*	16.65	4.76	.96*
C	16	5.31	3.83		9.88	1.86		15.19	4.20	

* = not significant.

Procedure

Six middle school teachers comprised the interdisciplinary team implementing the six-week FHAO unit. Their subject areas were: language arts, history, French, mathematics, science, and art/music. The language arts, history, and art/music teachers participated in a Facing History Institute during the Summer of 1993. As part of this intensive program, the teachers met with the Facing History coordinator serving the urban area and began developing plans for implementation. Throughout the school year, the program coordinator provided guidance and support to the team of teachers. The coordinator also helped to plan the pilot study and administered the pretest and posttest to both the FHAO and control classes.

During the six-week period of the implementation, the experimental class attended daily language arts and history classes, and attended mathematics and art/music classes one or two times a week. The group was intact for all classes, except art and music, which some children from other classes also attended. The experimental and control classes were administered the same pretest at the beginning and end of the six-week period. Students were given one class period to complete each of the surveys.

RESULTS

T tests for independent samples were used to analyze differences between the experimental and control group on three posttest measures (Specific Score, General Score, and Total Score). Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and t values for these three analyses.

TABLE 2. T tests for specific, general, and total mean posttest scores for experimental and control group.

GROUP	N	SPECIFIC SCORE			GENERAL SCORE			TOTAL SCORE		
		M	SD	t	M	SD	t	M	SD	t
E	20	21.20	7.91	5.47*	11.55	3.41	2.54**	32.70	10.10	5.34*
C	16	8.06	6.09		8.69	3.30		16.75	7.13	

* $p < .001$
** $p < .05$

As indicated in Table 2, the comparisons of all three means were significant. At the end of the six-week period the experimental group (E) which participated in the FHAO course performed significantly better than the control group (C) on items addressing specific historical content ($p < .001$), general items requiring reasoning about human relationships and responsibilities ($p < .05$), and on the total posttest score ($p < .001$). The experimental group's total score mean is almost twice that of the control group's (M = 32.70 for the experimental group; M = 16.75 for the control group); the experimental group's specific score mean is more than twice that of the control group (M = 21.20 for the experimental group; M= 8.06 for the control group).

In addition to these large differences between the experimental and control group means on the Specific and Total scores, the standard deviations (SD) associated with these means reflect a high degree of variability for both groups, with the scores in the experimental group

being somewhat more variable. However, both group's scores were much less variable on the general score measure.

DISCUSSION

Presented below is a summary of the major findings of this pilot study which relate to the two student outcomes addressed. It is followed by some limitations to be considered in interpreting the findings and designing future implementations.

Summary

The experimental group of middle school students, after participating in a six-week FHAO course, showed a significantly greater increase in knowledge of the period of Nazi totalitarianism and the Holocaust, in comparison to a control group of similar subjects (a mean gain of 13.75 for the experimental group as compared to 7.45 for the control group). This gain in "specific" test scores was based on responses to ten matched items and six short-answer items asking for specific historical content.

Although the FHAO students showed a large mean gain in factual knowledge, examination of the quality of the responses to these items raises several concerns. First, there was a great deal of variability among responses to these items (see SD in Table 2), suggesting that some students made little or no progress. Second, there was little evidence to suggest high levels of student understanding; ideas were not fully developed and were frequently unidimensional. For example, posttest responses to the question, "What was the Holocaust?" included [direct quotes]: "a Jews religoun;" "a war against the Jews;" "something that the Jews went through that Hitler started;" and "the torturing of the Jews." Third, many students were unable to use written language to accurately express coherent thoughts, e.g., "The Holocaust was a poird of time where Jews was treated like slave and worst.;" "The Holocaust was whan the touring of the Jews I do not no none of this stuff." A last issue concerns responses to the factual matching items. In many cases, students failed to attempt intelligent guesses, for example, to match "Adolph Hitler," the only person on the first list, with "Leader of Germany from 1933 to 1945," the only person description on the second list. Moreover, the factual information and vocabulary that students did have, e.g., "Adolph Hitler" and "The Final Solution," could have been, but was not in most cases, used to enrich responses to other items.

The FHAO students also showed a significantly greater increase in "general" items addressing issues such as reasoning about human relationships and the implications of one's actions, in comparison to the control group (a mean gain of 2.35 for the experimental group as compared to a mean decrease of 1.19 for the control group).

Examination of the content and quality of these responses reveals some major findings of interest. First, although students had definite opinions around issues such as friendship, and group membership, their feelings and opinions seemed to be tied to their own personal experience rather than informed by critical thought and placed in an historical context. For example, responses to "What are some of the problems with being part of a group?" included (direct quotes): "Sometimes when you're in a group it's always someone in that group trying to be bossy," "Some people who aren't in the group don't like you and they think you have changed," and "You can get into trouble with them." Perhaps a better set of items could have been developed to assess change in student ability to make connections between historical events and students' experiences and choices; questions of analogy and metaphor could be considered.

When asked what they thought they had learned during this class this Spring, most FHAO students cited some specific fact(s), such as, "Hitler was insane and the Jews did not expect this," while others were unable to respond, e.g., "I learned about things I heard of but didn't actually know what it was." However, some students did respond on a conceptual level and successfully made meaningful connections. For example, one girl wrote, "I learned of the pain and agony of the Holocaust. I learned that as is slaves were not the only ones who had trials of terror and that African-American and Jews are all most the same and history but most of all I learned that one person's rage can become a world's rage."

Limitations

A number of limiting factors must be kept in mind in interpreting the results of this pilot study. First, is the high mortality rate for both the experimental and control groups. Many of the students that initially completed the pretest dropped out of the group and were thus eliminated from the study (the experimental group was reduced by 38%; the control group was reduced by 50%). Absenteeism and mobility are particularly critical issues for urban schools and thus do not reflect any relationship to the contents of this study.

A second limitation involves the relatively short duration (six weeks) of the FHAO instruction. It might be expected that students need greater exposure to the program, more directed experience and application with the program contents, to demonstrate intellectual and general thinking gains. In addition, the quality and intensity of the use of instructional time during the six-week period need to be examined.

A third limitation of the study concerns the importance of writing ability for responding to the short-answer items. In some cases, it is difficult to determine if knowledge is not displayed because of level of comprehension (e.g., when asked if "I was only following orders'" was an adequate defense at the Nuremberg trials, one student in the control group responded that, "I would like to answer this question but I don't know what the word adequate means.") Although it is possible that other measures would more accurately reflect student understanding, such as a personal interview, the middle school students participating in this study clearly need to be better prepared to interpret written questions, determine the type of response required, and to use written language to develop a coherent and appropriate response. More importantly, they need to develop their writing skills and to better connect reading, writing, and thinking. The use of highly engaging material to which inner-city students can develop a personal connection, such as that provided by Facing History and Ourselves, would seem to provide an excellent opportunity for students to develop these critical abilities.

The findings of this pilot study can be useful to the FHAO program developers as well as to the classroom teachers implementing the program. First, and perhaps most important, the goals of the program must be clear to teachers as well as to students. Second, issues around student test taking must be addressed, as well as issues related to reading-writing-thinking connections. And third, the survey needs to be revised, particularly with regard to the set of "general" items. Considering these limitations, measures of program impact should also include classroom observations, teacher and perhaps student interviews, and a review of implementation data. Due to time constraints, these methods could not be incorporated into the current pilot study, with the exception of one interview session with the team of middle school teachers early in the implementation period.

APPENDIX

Facing History and Ourselves Pre and Post Student Surveys

Name _____ **Grade** _____

Teacher _____ **School** _____

FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES
PRE STUDENT SURVEY

Part I: These questions focus on thinking and reasoning about human relationships. In the space following each question, write your response.

1. Why is friendship important to you? Why do people seem to need friends?

2. If friends get into an argument, what is the best way to settle it? Why?

3. What are some of the problems with being part of a group?

4. Under what situations does a group need rules? Why are rules generally important? When can rules become a problem?

5. Under what situations does a group need a leader? How do groups generally decide on who is a leader? What are some of the problems in having a leader in a group?

PART II: In the space following each question, write your response.

1. What was the Holocaust?

2. What are some of the reasons why the Holocaust occurred?

3. The Horace Mann Middle School has 24 students in the 8th grade Facing History class. Sixteen students are African-Americans, four students are Spanish-speaking as their home language, and four students come from Asian countries.

   On February 15th at 1:00 p.m., an argument developed in class between two students over an incident that had occurred earlier in the cafeteria. Everyone in the class took sides in the conflict, which you also witnessed.

   What issues should you consider in describing what happened that afternoon?

PART III: In the blank at the left of each item, place the letter of the phrase that is the best match. All letters will not be used.

____	1. Propaganda	A. Symbol of the Nazi Party
____	2. Antisemitism	B. Planned killing of a race or cultural group
____	3. The Final Solution	C. Strong feeling for or against somebody formed before one knows them
____	4. Adolf Hitler	D. Hatred of Jews
____	5. Prejudice	E. Leader of Germany from 1933-1945
____	6. Swastika	F. The plan to exterminate the Jews
____	7. Kristallnacht	G. The idea that living space was a necessity for Germany
____	8. Auschwitz	H. A night in 1938 on which homes, synagogues, and businesses of Jews were destroyed
____	9. Totalitarianism	I. A system of government under which control rests with one political party
____	10. Lebensraum	J. Material that is made to persuade or indoctrinate people to support a certain position
		K. A concentration camp and death camp

Part IV: These questions focus on issues and content from the unit. In the space following each question, write your response.

1. Why was the Hitler Youth Movement successful?

2. How did Hitler get the German people to support him?

3. How did other nations respond to the Nazi policies of terror and racism?

4. At the Nuremberg Trials, the Nazi leaders said, in their defense, "I was only following orders." Was this an adequate defense? Explain your answer.

PART V: Summary Question

1. What do you consider a citizen's major responsibilities in a democratic society?

Name _____ **Grade** _____ **Date**_____

Teacher _____ **School**_____

FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES
POST STUDENT SURVEY

PART I: In the space following each question, write your response.

1. What was the Holocaust?

2. What are some of the reasons why the Holocaust occurred?

3. What do you think you have learned during this class this Spring? List the most important ideas, issues, materials, and discussions you remember from the course.

Part II: Concept of Democracy and Citizenship

1. What do you consider a citizen's major responsibilities in a democratic society?

PART III: In the blank at the left of each item, place the letter of the phrase that is the best match. All letters will not be used.

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____	2. Antisemitism	B. Planned killing of a race or cultural group
____	3. The Final Solution	C. Strong feeling for or against somebody formed before one knows them
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